Developing Joint Force Leaders for Globally Integrated Operations

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The 20th Century posed significant challenges to global stability and to the very existence of the United States and its allies. Working through a network of strong alliances and with the effective application of America’s economic and military instruments of power, the U.S. was instrumental in shaping the course of global events throughout the latter half of the century. Twenty-first Century challenges are uniquely different but equally significant in their potential to undermine U.S. security. These challenges, however, are not limited to one country or one region of the world. Rather, these challenges are simultaneously global, local, and transnational, and whose benefactors or proponents leverage advanced technologies and the effects of globalization to enhance their positions and causes worldwide.

U.S. allies’ and partners’ security interests, intrinsically linked to U.S. national interests, are equally vulnerable to these same challenges. Unfortunately, neither the U.S. nor any of its allies or partners has the resources or capabilities necessary to address these challenges alone. The U.S., however, continues to have a strong alliance system, the world’s largest economy, and an unequaled military with which to form the core of a global partnership to address these global challenges. Recognizing the demand for strong global leadership, coupled with the unique capabilities of the U.S. military, the President stated in the 2010 National Security Strategy that the U.S. will maintain its role as the global leader by continuing to “to underwrite global security.” The President recently reiterated this commitment in the 2012 Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense strategic guidance document stating, “We seek the security of our Nation, allies, and partners.” The Secretary of Defense provided further amplification for the U.S. military stating, “The Joint Force will be prepared to confront and defeat aggression anywhere in the world.” The challenge for the Joint Force thus becomes developing an operating concept that facilitates local actions with partners around the world to take on the challenges of the 21st Century.

The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Martin Dempsey, recently proposed such an operating concept in the Capstone Concept for Joint Operations: Joint Force 2020 (2012). “Globally integrated operations” calls for elements of the Joint Force to be globally postured with the ability to combine quickly with other Joint Force and mission partners to “integrate capabilities across domains, echelons, geographic boundaries, and organizational affiliations.” Given that the U.S. is thus reliant on global partners to execute its security strategy, an implication for the Joint Force is the development of global leaders, at all echelons, who possess the ability to collaborate with a wide range of partners to attain shared objectives or goals. In the past, the overwhelming resources that the U.S. could bring to any partnership minimized or eliminated the need for true collaboration. Today, fiscal realities coupled with the expanding global commons requires U.S. leaders to develop a truly collaborative approach to problem-solving that achieve a greater degree of synergy, improves team performance, and provides mutual benefits for each participant or stakeholder (Stagich, 2001).
This essay posits that globally integrated operations demands a change in current education, training, and mentoring opportunities for future Joint Force leaders. The Joint Force requires culturally “savvy” leaders capable of developing a global perspective, able to synthesize diverse viewpoints, and with the ability to collaborate across a range of cultures. To support this argument, this essay begins with a short discussion of the current strategic environment and the concept of globally integrated operations. It defines global leadership and the role that culture plays, identifies potential barriers that must be overcome, and identifies the adaptations leaders need to operate successfully in a global environment. The essay concludes with a list of recommended global leader competencies that must be integrated into education, training, and mentoring programs to develop Joint Force leaders capable of operating globally in a collaborative manner.

Globally Integrated Operations

Over the past century the world has changed in significant ways. For example, communication and transportation costs have plummeted opening up vast areas of the world to the masses that for centuries were accessible by only a few wealthy elite. The breakdown of Communism opened up countries once isolated or suspicious of the West. International migration increased significantly as workers looked to improve their livelihoods in industrialized nations. As well, the rise and pervasiveness of international organizations have provided a voice and venue for the smallest countries or special interest groups. In more recent years, the proliferation of the Internet has altered dramatically the structure and processes of economic, political, and social networks (Zweifel, 2003). In many ways, technology and globalization have conspired to make the world appear smaller and more familiar.

Appearances, however, can be deceiving. Unfettered global access and communication have not made the world smaller; quite the contrary, it has become larger (Black, Morrison, & Gergersen, 1999). With distance and communications no longer obstacles, Americans come in contact daily with an array of nations, tribes, ethnic groups, religious groups, linguistic groups, and other cultural groupings that previous generations could ignore. Given the effects of globalization and the interconnectedness of today’s economies, gone are the days when American lives could be lived locally, unaware of the rest of the world. Today’s world is truly a global community and, like it or not, America is part of that community. In fact, America plays a number of vital roles in this global community, one of which is the underwriter of global security.

The global community in which the Joint Force currently operates is predominantly non-Western (65%), non-white (70%), and non-Christian (70%) (Zweifel, 2003) and those numbers will increase. In addition, researchers estimate that the global economy could triple by 2030, with half of the increase coming from developing countries (Keys & Wellins, 2008). With this global mosaic in mind, new operational challenges and exposure to risk characterize today’s global political environment. Unfamiliar regions—distinguished by incongruent national and political boundaries, global digital networks, and the free flow of capital, information, and people across national borders—already encumbered with demanding local challenges are becoming more complex because of these transnational dynamics.

To protect U.S. interests and to facilitate global stability, security, and prosperity, the Joint Force must be capable of effectively operating in these complex and dangerous localities. The dynamics of each specific challenge are unique requiring small Joint Force units capable of forming for a specific mission on short notice, adapting to environmental demands over time, disbanding upon mission completion, and capable of reforming again in a different structure for a potentially wholly different mission set. These units must be able to respond and adapt at a rate that mirrors environmental changes. Given the limitations in time and space associated with global operations, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Martin Dempsey, is advocating the concept of globally integrated operations as a way to protect U.S. national
interests.

Globally integrated operations leverages three essential components: pre-positioned global forces, rapid expeditionary basing, and partnering. The first component, pre-positioned global forces, leverages locations around the world to respond to current needs and anticipated operations. The ability to adapt to the changing environment make short-term “leases” on foreign bases the more appropriate mechanism, but logistics, diplomatic agreements, national interest, and other factors may limit flexibility. Time, space, and national interest—essentially risk—will dictate these relationships. The second component is rapid expeditionary basing, which allows potentially limited expertise and resources to be brought to bear quickly, providing for a more appropriate task-tailored response. Rapid expeditionary basing puts the onus on the State Department to cultivate relationships in anticipation of potential military operations. The third component, a robust partner network, leverages other U.S. governmental agencies as well as other national, regional, and international organizations. The complex nature of almost all security challenges requires the use of more than one instrument of power and the sustained capabilities of any one nation. Partnering thus becomes a premium national security component as it allows expertise and resources not resident within the Joint Force to be integrated into a variety of operations (Dempsey, 2012a).

Global Leadership and Culture

Globally integrated operations demand a new type of Joint Force leader. Past leadership requirements had a domestic mindset and put a premium on functional expertise, prioritization, structure, individual responsibility, and predictability. Twenty-first Century leadership requires a global mindset; a mindset that emphasizes a broader perspective, a balancing of contradictions, teamwork and diversity, an ability to embrace, if not welcome, change, and an openness to surprises. Joint Force global leaders must have the ability to understand the global security environment, the role the U.S. plays in maintaining that environment, and U.S. national security objectives. In essence, Joint Force global leaders must be able to see the emergence of the entire security environment as it self-organizes and as the whole partly defines the individual components.

Joint Force global leaders must be systems thinkers par excellence with the ability to frame the “global structural relationships that result in dynamic networks as opposed to staid, patterned interactions or relationships predicated on one’s position in the hierarchy” (Marquardt & Berger, 2000, 24). Joint Force global leaders must be adaptive, innovative, critical thinkers capable of operating in complex, ill-defined, and multicultural environments as demanded by the globally integrated operations concept. Unfortunately, homogeneous groups, such as the U.S. Joint Force, tend to have the same world view and approach to problem-solving. Globally integrated operations demands that the Joint Force expand its traditional group of problem-solving stakeholders to include those partners with whom the Joint Force is dependent upon for understanding, access, capabilities, and problem-solving.

Global leadership requires the ability to simplify complex conceptual issues and processes, and inspire (Marquardt & Berger, 2000) a variety of, and often disparate, group of stakeholders. It requires the creation of a shared vision and strategy, which is essential to successful operations.

Culturally diverse views help broaden the Joint Force’s understanding of the environment and provide it with a broader and more varied base of experiences from which to draw in solving problems. Diverse groups typically generate more alternatives to the solution of a problem, and typically have higher levels of divergent thinking and cognitive flexibility (Miller, Fields, Kumar, & Ortiz, 2000).

Before attempting to understand other cultures in the strategic environment, however, Joint Force leaders first must develop an understanding of their own culture, to include biases and preferences. Understanding that the U.S. is merely expressing its own national preferences and that other peoples and nations have
their own preferences is the first step in developing a deeper understanding of the global environment. Understanding these cultural differences can help Joint Force global leaders communicate more effectively across cultural and geographical boundaries (Northouse, 2007).

Global Barriers to Collaboration

Crossing cultural lines is one of the primary barriers to developing a collaborative environment. It is the crossing of cultural lines that assaults the identity of a person and which often results in the reliance upon preconceived, ill-informed perceptions to develop a sense of stability in new, often overwhelming, environments. When an individual is operating in another culture, the problem is not that working or living in the culture is inherently more difficult; the problem is the differences in the contexts, rather than the contexts themselves. Unfamiliar processes, customs, and people are easily reconciled, but functioning effectively requires an understanding of the multiple contexts and their often subtle, yet important, differences. When the Joint Force operates globally, the cultural aspects are critical—leaders must understand the frame of reference and must be ready to accept various views, many of which may appear unusual (McCall & Hollenbeck, 2002).

Fear and concern over the intention of fellow stakeholders are also barriers to successful collaboration. As such, individuals and organizations are inclined to maintain their own self-serving agendas to keep their edge in a competitive environment (Stagich, 2001). Closely related to fear and concern, ethnocentrism and prejudice can undermine any collaborative effort. Ethnocentrism is the universal “tendency for individuals to place their own group at the center of their observations of others and the world.” They “give priority and value to their own beliefs, attitudes, and values over and above those of other groups,” and typically expressed in some form of prejudicial behavior. “Ethnocentrism is a perceptual window through which people from one culture make subjective or critical evaluations of people from other culture—it prevents people from fully understanding or respecting the world of others” (Northouse, 2007, 303).

Organizational Adaptations to Global Demands

In the past, the primary challenge to solving problems was to obtain and apply the right knowledge in an efficient manner. Tomorrow’s security challenges are less likely to correspond to current geographic and functionally based organizational structures. Instead, structures will be increasingly shaped by the challenges themselves (Dempsey, 2012a). These challenges are interrelated and specific problem identification becomes increasingly confusing, let alone finding a solution. As a result, problem-solving will no longer be the domain of any one person or leader—the Joint Force needs to incorporate the collective skills, expertise, talents, imagination, and perspectives of many people to find answers to tomorrow’s dilemmas.

The role of senior leaders is to stimulate the organization, not control it. Senior leaders encourage organizational learning and ensure the appropriate mechanisms for transferring knowledge and the lessons learned are in place. Learning is at the heart of the Joint Force’s ability to adapt to a rapidly changing environment. The Joint Force has to learn better than its adversaries or competitors and apply that knowledge faster and more widely than they do. Globally integrated operations require a force with a diverse skill set—a force that can understand technical concepts, rapidly determine adaptive solutions or innovations, or quickly procure the needed technical expertise either from the U.S. or from within the local community as time and conditions permit. It requires Joint Force leaders to develop multi-disciplinary and cross-functional skills at the expense of in-depth domain expertise (Marquardt & Berger, 2000).

Implementing globally integrated operations demands agile strategic thinkers who have the capacity to hold two simultaneous yet outwardly incompatible ideas at the same time, are comfortable with extended
periods of ambiguity, and can still function while awaiting clarity. To be effective, Joint Force leaders will have to adapt to and manage the following 10 global leadership paradoxes in the execution of globally integrated operations:

1. Strategic and tactical—Joint Force leaders must always keep strategy in mind when operating tactically. Short-term opportunities and the urgency of day-to-day activities are often at odds with long-term strategic interests.

2. Global leader and global collaborator—the need to pursue specific national security objectives must be balanced by the need to leverage global partner expertise and resources. The characteristics of collaborative groups include equal and active participation, reciprocal benefit, diversity, peer status, mutual respect, and shared meaning or understanding.

3. Results and relationships—Joint Force leaders must balance achieving national objectives at the expense of building and maintaining vital relationships with global partners whose objectives may not align with or facilitate attainment of U.S. objectives.

4. Listening and expressing—Joint Force leaders must ask questions and listen to a variety of perspectives but must also clearly express their own point of view.

5. Global and local—Joint Force leaders need to operate with a global, cosmopolitan mindset yet be sensitive to local conditions.

6. Commonality and uniqueness—Joint Force leaders must pay close attention to common group characteristics and respect cultural differences but also appreciate the unique qualities of each individual.

7. Open mind and decisiveness—Joint Force leaders must be open to others’ ideas and inputs with a nonjudgmental attitude but also analyze data and make decisions, often without consulting others.

8. Consistency and versatility—Joint Force leaders must provide clear and consistent direction to others but also adapt to particular conditions, situations, or people.

9. Humility and confidence—Joint Force leaders must be humble about their own accomplishments, limitations, and mistakes but also convey self-confidence that attracts others to trust their leadership.

10. Doing and being—Joint Force leaders must consider what they do and make things happen, while, at the same time, mindful of their energetic presence.

Recommendations

There are three broad competencies that global leaders continually must cultivate to gain and maintain cultural and contextual understanding and to reduce uncertainty. First, Joint Force leaders must understand the current and future conditions that make strategic sense. Second, they must understand global trends and their implications to the U.S. and other global and local actors. Third, Joint Force leaders must strive to seek information contrary to the strategy or trends, particularly information at the local or tactical level. Leading the Joint Force through uncertainty means feeling comfortable with the unknown, and Joint Force global leaders can never know all of the answers beforehand because they simply cannot anticipate every scenario. With that in mind, globally integrated operations will require Joint Force leaders who know that hard and fast goals and policies must be supported and circumvented—at the same time (Black, Morrison, & Gergersen, 1999, 104).

Globally integrated operations will put the command concept of mission command (Dempsey, 2012b) to the test. Joint Force leaders and their superiors must possess a shared understanding of the mission and the operating environment to facilitate subsequent operations based upon commander’s intent. Seniors leaders must also trust leaders in the field to make the right decisions based upon the local circumstances, and support them when mistakes are made.

To enhance Joint Force leaders’ decision-making skills, the following competencies must be developed
throughout one’s career through educational, training, and mentoring means (McCall & Hollenbeck, 2002).

- Open-minded and flexible in thought and tactics. Joint Force leaders must be comfortable living and working in a variety of cultural settings, and be willing and able to listen to other people, approaches, and ideas. They must possess a natural inquisitiveness, which serves as a source of energy and helps one to “learn on the fly” as situations unfold.
- Cultural interest and sensitivity. Joint Force leaders must respect other cultures, people, and points of view. They must not be arrogant or judgmental and be curious and interested in differences. Joint Force leaders must view uncertainty as an invigorating and natural aspect of the global environment and relish the challenge of balancing the dynamic tensions between national strategic objectives and local or regional demands.
- Able to deal with complexity. Joint Force leaders must consider many variables in problem-solving, be comfortable with ambiguity, and show patience in evolving issues. They must be able to see pattern and connections in complex or chaotic environments and make decisions in times of uncertainty. Joint Force leaders must know when to gather more information and when to act, and be willing to accept the risks associated with each.
- Resilient, resourceful, optimistic, and energetic. Joint Force leaders must respond to a challenge and not be discouraged by adversity. They must be self-reliant, creative, and see the positive side of things. Joint Force leaders must possess a high level of physical and emotional energy, and able to deal with professional and personal stress.
- Character. Joint Force leaders must be able to connect emotionally with people of different backgrounds and cultures by consistently demonstrating personal integrity in the face of ethical conflicts. The goodwill and trust of people is engendered through personal character.
- Stable personal life. The Joint Force leader must develop and maintain stress-resistant personal arrangements, to include one’s family that supports a commitment to work.
- Value-added technical or operational skills. The Joint Force leader must possess technical, leadership, domain expertise, or other skills sufficient to establish his or her credibility. These skills provide the Joint Force leader with the ability to recognize global opportunities and to mobilize organizational resources to capitalize on them.

**Conclusion**

Globally integrated operations is the Joint Force’s operating concept that seeks to balance the security demands levied on U.S. global leadership and the need to sustain an unmatched military capability in a fiscally constrained environment. Attaining U.S. national security interests is dependent on the Joint Force’s ability to work with partners throughout the world. Although operating globally poses complex challenges for the Joint Force, those same complexities present opportunities, enabling multiple pathways and creative options. Tomorrow’s operational challenges are less technical than they are cultural, and enhancing multicultural awareness and developing global leaders capable of thinking on multiple levels simultaneously is needed.

Globally integrated operations require a relatively small, high leverage investment, but senior leaders who fail to make that investment early pay an enormous price. Operating with and within different cultures creates more, and more dramatic, opportunities for a particular pattern of strengths and weaknesses to shift from effective in one setting to disastrous in another. Teams with greater diversity tend to have a more collaborative conflict management style and have more in-depth discussions before making decisions. Globally integrated operations provide the Joint Force with an operating concept capable of meeting the demands of the 21st Century. The potential for exceptional Joint Force global leadership resides in the cadre of outstanding men and women who currently serve—global leadership competencies, however,
must be integrated into current education, training, and mentoring programs to develop Joint Force global leaders capable of collaborating with partners and allies.

References


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